

What is claimed is:

1. A method for distributing licenses for a product comprising the steps of:
  - a) registering a vendor's product by storing a product identifier in conjunction with an encryption key and providing said encryption key to said vendor to use to encrypt said product; and
  - b) issuing a product license to a user, said product license including said product identifier information, but not said product itself, and a decryption key that mates with said encryption key.
- 10 2. A method for distributing licenses for a digital product comprising the steps of:
  - a) receiving a request for product registration from a vendor, said request including a product name and a vendor identifier;
  - b) assigning a product identifier and an encryption key to said product and forwarding registration to vendor, said registration including a product identifier, said key and said vendor identifier;
  - c) receiving a request from a user for a user license, said request including a user name and payment information;
  - d) assigning a user identifier to said user and forwarding a user license to said user, said license including said user identifier;
  - e) receiving a request for a product license from said user to use said product, said request including said user identifier and said product identifier;
  - f) issuing a product license to said user, said product license including a user identifier, the product identifier and a decryption key that mates with said encryption key.
- 25 3. A method for obtaining a license for digitally distributed material, comprising the steps of:
  - a) downloading encrypted digital material carrying a product identifier;
  - b) purchasing a digital license to use the material, said license including a decryption key to decrypt the material and the product identifier.
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4. A method according to claim 3, further comprising the steps of:  
c) obtaining a user license, said user license including a user identifier;  
and wherein said digital license includes said user identifier.

5 5. A method of obtaining a user license, comprising the steps of:  
a) establishing a connection for data transmission between the user's computer and  
a license provider's computer;  
b) transmitting via said data connection to the license provider a request for a user  
license including a user name and a system identifier that is unique to the user's  
10 computer;  
c) receiving via data connection a user license from the license provider, said user  
license including a user identifier assigned by the license provider.

15 6. A method of obtaining a user license according to claim 5, further comprising the  
step of:  
d) storing the user license on said user's computer.

20 7. A method of obtaining a user license according to claim 5, further comprising the  
steps of selecting and transmitting a password to the license provider and said user  
license incorporating said password.

25 8. A system for distributing user licenses, said system including:  
a) a server connected to a user computer for data connection therebetween;  
b) means for receiving from the user via said data connection a request for a user  
license, said request including a system identifier;  
c) means for assigning and storing a unique user identifier in association with said  
system identifier  
d) a database for storing user license records, each said user license record  
including a user identifier and a system identifier.

30 9. A system for distributing user licenses according to claim 8, wherein each said  
user license record includes a user name.

10. A system for distributing user licenses according to claim 8, wherein each said user license record includes a password.

11. A system for distributing user licenses according to claim 8, wherein each said 5 user license record includes the user's credit card number.

12. A system for distributing product licenses comprising:

- a) a server connected to a vendor computer and to a user computer for data connection therebetween;
- 10 b) means for receiving from the vendor a request for product registration where said request includes a product name;
- c) means for assigning a unique product identifier;
- d) means for transmitting to the vendor a product registration, said registration including said product identifier and an encryption key;
- 15 e) means for receiving from the user via said data connection a request for a product license, said request including a previously assigned user identifier and the product identifier;
- f) means for transmitting to the user a product license including a previously assigned product identifier, a user identifier and a decryption key that mates with said encryption key.

13. A system according to claim 12, further comprising:

- 25 g) a database for storing:
  - (i) user license records, each said user license record including a user identifier and a system identifier; and
  - (ii) product license records, each said product license record including a user identifier, a product identifier and a decryption key.

14. A system according to claim 13 wherein said database stores product registration 30 records, each said record including a vendor identifier and an encryption key.

15. A system for distributing licenses for a product, comprising:
  - a) a product registration process for assigning to a product a unique product identifier and an encryption key;
  - 5 b) a user registration process for assigning to a user a unique user identifier; and
  - c) a license distribution process coupled to the user registration process and to the product registration process for providing to the user a product license containing the user identifier and a decryption key that mates with said encryption key.

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